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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a general description of how Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana is moving towards competency-based instruction. A planning retreat was held and all instructional programs offered by the University were assessed with regard to the overall purposes of the institution and the prospect of developing a competency-based orientation. This assessment included the following: (a) the specification of goals and objectives in relation to the mission of the university, present efficiency of the program, and a competency-based orientation; (b) a description of substantive programs; (c) a description of the faculty model; and (d) a description of the evaluative component. Some considerations related to implementing a competency-based program include: (a) whether competency-based instructing is appropriate for curriculum components other than those at the professional level, (b) whether objectives in the affective domain can be formulated, and (c) which strategy should be used in changing to competency-based instruction. (PD)

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Implementing Competency-Based Educational Programs at Southern University

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IMPLEMENTING COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AT SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

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BACKGROUND

This paper discusses some prospects of one education institution's efforts to move in the direction of competency-based education. The Teacher Corps Guidelines have for several cycles required that proposals explain how Colleges of Education would implement the successful aspects of Teacher Corps Projects and move toward more flexible teacher preparation. The Guidelines have also encouraged movement toward competency-based teacher education (CBTE).

The College of Education at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana designed a plan for moving in this direction in 1970. The plan includes staff development activities, preparation, field testing, and refinement of instructional materials. Teacher Corps Projects at the University have served as prototypes for the competency-based teacher education movement in the College of Education.

FACULTY PARTICIPATION

Faculty members in the College of Education have been involved in activities related to competency-based instruction as individuals, and as groups. Individuals have attended and participated in workshops, conferences and seminars held at other institutions. Some have reviewed and revised course outlines and begun to develop modules for use in instruction.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Some instructional materials which were selected or developed for use with interns are being tried with regular college students. Since Teacher Corps interns are already college graduates it is expected that some adaptations will be necessary.

What appears to be significant about the efforts of this institution of higher education is the fact that the Colleges of Agriculture, Arts and Humanities, Business, Engineering, Home Economics, Sciences and the Graduate School are all implementing competency-based educational programs. At Southern University the term is no longer "Competency-Based Teacher Education," it is "Competency-Based Education."

THE PLANNING RETREAT

Under the leadership of Dr. E. C. Harrison, Vice-President for Academic Affairs, and with the assistance of a planning grant from an outside funding agency, representatives from all the Colleges in the University participated in a planning retreat for seven days in July, 1972. During this time all the instructional programs offered by the University were assessed with regard to the overall purposes of the institution and the prospect of developing a competency-based orientation. During the first two days of the retreat a developer of one of the Competency-Based Teacher Training Models provided a general orientation to the implementation of CBTE.

Specification of Goals and Objectives. Efforts to restructure academic programs were guided by (1) the extent to which program goals and objectives were relevant to the mission of the University, (2) the

present efficiency of the program in meeting its goals and objectives, and (3) a competency-based orientation. With regard to these three factors, goals and objectives for colleges and departments were restated. In restating its goals or objectives each college and department places emphasis upon what skills students will be able to demonstrate upon completing the various programs.

Description of Substantive Programs. The restatement of goals and objectives emphasizing student competencies became the basis for redesigning programs. Therefore, attempts were made to describe the type of programs that will produce students with the desired competencies. We recognized that the task of program specification is continuous. It involves members of the adademic community, consumers of the product (such as employers of graduates from the program) and the students themselves. Because program specification is a continuous process, a fundamental concern has been to develop an efficient system of feedback with components which produce sufficient, relevant, accurate and current information.

Description of the Faculty Model. The conception of the role of the teacher is a pivotal factor to consider in planning a move into competency-based instruction. Because of this, representatives of each college and department made efforts to describe in behavioral terms the type of teacher who can function effectively in competency-based instruction. As the movement progresses, this specified model will serve as a basis for faculty development and training.

There was a general consensus that it is hazardous to designate behaviors which must characterize every teacher. The idiosyncratic

nature of successful teaching methods suggests that staff development activities ought to be kept especially flexible and individualistic. The extent to which this can be done without compromising student progress toward the stated objectives will influence the course of the staff development phase of the competency-based movement at Southern University.

Description of Evaluative Component. Representatives from colleges and departments decided there is a continuous need to know whether a program is successful. It was, therefore, necessary to delineate the data, and the sources of data, that will constitute acceptable indications of success. This required an evaluative component which is both process and product centered. Initial efforts resulted in the identification of the data that will be desirable. The evaluative component also provides broad guidelines for ascertaining and using the data.

The evaluative component is an essential part of an academic planning model. The extent to which it functions as intended or fails to conform to the expectations of the college and department representatives will ultimately be revealed through operations.

PRESENT STATUS

The Southern University academic planning model is currently under study by the total university faculty. The model and the whole competency-based movement have met with mixed reactions. Many faculty members have been concerned about the question of accountability and see competency-based education as one means of responding to demands for accountability from both the educational community and the public.

There are those teachers who say their instruction has been competency-based all along. Other instructors wonder if such sharply focused instructional activities will tend to restrict creativity in teaching and in student response.

Some significant first steps have been taken toward implementing competency-based education at Southern University. The results of these and further efforts in that direction will be influenced by continuing faculty support, and equally important, by the availability of sufficient financial resources.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

As educational institutions generally, and institutions of higher education specifically, struggle with problems resulting from efforts to change there is a need to share experiences related to such problems. Disclosure of problems encountered and solutions attempted makes possible refinement and adaptation based on the reactions of qualified critics, such as other educators who may be struggling with similar problems.

Some fundamental issues related to the implementation of competency-based instructional programs are not yet entirely resolved. For example, much discussion centers around whether or not competency-based instruction is appropriate for curriculum components other than those at the professional level. Another area that demands attention is that of formulating objectives in the affective domain. Southern University's efforts to restate objectives did not result in objectives that dealt with the affective domain; as is often the case, the cognitive domain proved easier to measure using performance criteria.

There is also debate about the strategy that should be used in changing to competency-based instruction. Various areas that must be involved include instructional staff development, procurement of instructional materials, and preparation of service sub-systems such as registration and accounting. These are only some issues which come to mind. Most of these are multi-diminsional, and no effort can be made to discuss them here.

Our main concern here has been to provide a general discription of how one institution is moving into competency-based instruction. It is perhaps wise to defer discussions which center on the controversial issues involved in implementing CBTE, until such discussions can include more results of experience and less theory.